



John Hunt House

# G A Z E T T E

Vol. IX No. 2

RIGHT ON.

February, 1997

## THE FIFTH WHEEL OF THE WAGON

**L**isa Roy, registered nurse, Civil War reenactor, tells us that Abraham Lincoln called the medical profession "the fifth wheel of the wagon". She goes on to say, "For while the Civil War elicits images of primitive surgery and piles of limbs behind a tent, much of what the Civil War surgeon learned is still in practice in some form."

Ms. Roy will portray a 19<sup>th</sup> century physician when she visits us on **Monday, February 24, 7:30 p.m.** at Riverside Congregational Church.

For the past fourteen years she has been a Civil War reenactor and has been actively researching 19<sup>th</sup> century medicine for over six years. For the past eight years she has served as coordinator of the annual **Civil War Living History and Battle Reenactment** held at Riverbend (Voss) Farm in Uxbridge, Massachusetts on Columbus Day weekend.

Her other 19<sup>th</sup> century interests include domestic textile production and lace-making. She is a model ship builder, is currently restoring her own sailboat, and volunteers on the schooner "**Quinnipaick**", the flag ship of New Haven, Connecticut. She is a registered nurse, working in a group practice in Providence. All this...and an avid reader, too!

Be sure to mark your calendar. Refreshments and business meeting will follow.

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## Historical Marker Presentation Scheduled for February 24<sup>th</sup>

by *Kris Rose, Chairman, Markers Committee*

It is my pleasure to announce that the first Historical Marker of 1997 will be presented to **Leslie O'Brien and James Cook**, owners of the **Charles Pierce House** at 18 Fourth Street at the February 24<sup>th</sup> Members Meeting.

Please attend the meeting and join us in congratulating Ms O'Brien and Mr. Cook for their effort to preserve the history of East Providence.

## From the Attic

by *Edna Anness, Museum Curator*

**W**hile doing research for the Images of America - East Providence book I found several people, including our own members, who did not know anything about the **Old Town Hall**. This building was built in 1812 using lumber from the old **Newman Meeting House**, which was torn down in 1810 and replaced by the current Newman Church building now standing on Newman Avenue.

For the few years prior to 1812 there was movement in political circles to trim down the size of the Town of Rehoboth, which was a very large area spread out between the Seekonk River, the Bay, and Taunton. It was decided to split the area roughly in half and the area along the river and bay would be called Seekonk. Up until this separation in 1812 the Town had been governed from the Newman Meeting House, which was not only a place of worship, but also a Town Hall meeting place.

When we became the Town of Seekonk in 1812 we built a Greek Revival style hall on the corner of Miller and Pawtucket Avenues, right **next door to where the Rumford Library is today**. The building served several purposes. First, it was the Town Hall where Town Meetings and **Town Council Meetings** were held. There was a large hall on the first floor and several smaller rooms on the second floor where the **Rumford Volunteer Fire Company** held meetings and played cards. The Grammar and High School held their **public speaking competitions** there and the Union School its eighth grade **graduations** until Wilson School was built. During World War II the **Ration Board** was located here. The **Rumford Grange** met here before building their hall on North Broadway. The **Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and Mrs. Conlon's Dancing Class** met here. It was a Ward I **polling place**.

Going back to 1870, it was apparent that the center of community activity was moving to the Watchemoket area and a branch Town Office opened there. Eventually a new Town Hall was built on Taunton Avenue in 1889 in a more central location.

And speaking of Dancing! From a Providence Journal article dated January 6, 1902, "In looking over Town Clerk's records (Rehoboth) one is struck with the frequency with which town meetings were held and for what reasons. In December, 1850 and

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continued on page 3 "TOWN HALL"

## Board Briefs

**Nancy Moore** nominated the spectacular white oak (*quercus alba*) featured as the December "tree of the month" in the **Notable Trees of Rhode Island** calendar. The actual tree is located at the Bridgham Farm. The calendar is selling through March and is \$10.00, \$4.00 going to the Historical Society. Place your order with Nancy by calling 438-4299.

**David Kelleher**, Society member and history buff, presented his "**Historic East Providence**" slide show to the East Bay Chapter of the DAR. They met in the old Jail House in Bristol. The 150 slides include scenes of turn-of-the-century Crescent Park, Boyden Heights, Vanity Fair, Watchemoket as well as more contemporary sites. Perhaps your group would be interested. Call the Society at 438-1750 for information.

The word "**buff**" has an interesting etymology. Around 1820, the volunteer firemen in New York City wore buff colored overcoats. Fire enthusiasts, those who ran like 'blazes' to get to blazes, became known as buffs. Today they're called buffoons, aren't they?

### Correspondence

First of all I wish to thank you for publishing my article entitled "**The Three Railroads of East Providence**" in the *Gazette*. I was very pleased to hear from many people who had read the article and who thought it was very interesting. Now I wish to reply to Kenneth Roberts' letter in the December issue. In my opening two paragraphs of my article I implied that they weren't trolley cars but the electric trains (later diesel rail cars) of the New Haven Railroad that were seen crossing over parts of Bullocks Cove. Yes, as Mr. Roberts pointed out, there was the trestle that crossed over part of the cove and, yes, they were the trolley cars of the R.I. Suburban Railway...but it was only for a short period of time...about the turn of the century.

There are only two engineering maps in the City Clerk's Office dating from that era. One is dated 1895, the second from 1917. The first map shows only the Consolidated Railroad skirting Bullocks Cove. The Crescent Park street car line was in place...but it dead-ended at the Park. The 1917 map differed slightly from the older map. The street car line now made a loop at Crescent Park (which us old-timers should remember) and an extension just north of the Park which was originally the R.I. Suburban Railway. But according to this map, it ended just west of Bullocks Cove. So obviously the trolley line was built after 1895 and abandoned before 1917. So my opening remarks should have said that "no one alive today could possibly remember seeing the trolleys crossing the Cove and they simply had to be the electric trains (prior to 1930) of the New Haven Railroad".

Mr. Roberts apparently does not remember the freight trains traveling on the Consolidated Division of the New Haven Railroad. Actually, up to the 1970's the railroad operated at least 4 freight trains in E. Providence. One was the Darlington job serving Philipsdale and the eastern part of Pawtucket, the Rumford job serving the central part of the city and the old Boston & Providence line as far as Narragansett Park. Also, the oil job which served the three large oil terminals located on the old Consolidated Railroad plus the Bristol local which served various manufacturers and coal dealers from Riverside to Bristol. Again, thank you very much for publishing my article.

*Brookes Porter, Rumford*

## The GAZETTE

is published monthly by the  
**EAST•PROVIDENCE•HISTORICAL•SOCIETY**

P.O. Box 4774, East Providence, RI 02916-4774  
(401) 438-1750

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1062 Willett Avenue, Riverside

## MEMORIAL FUND

The Society's **Memorial Fund** was established in 1993 in memory of past members for "the betterment of the Society and with no specific purpose." The Memorial Fund is a qualified endowment administered by the executive committee. Members and friends wishing to contribute may make checks payable to the  
**East Providence Historical Society**  
and mail to the Society at:

Box 4774  
East Providence, RI 02916

## New Members

**Warm Welcome to Our New Member**  
Florence Thompson



*The Old Town Hall (above) was erected in 1812 on the corner of Pawtucket Avenue and Miller Avenue in Rumford, using lumber from the Newman Meeting House. In addition to being the Town Hall, it served a variety of purposes for over 100 years.*



*Sadly, when the Old Town Hall was condemned and torn down in 1957, all of the lumber, including the front door of the Newman Meeting House, was destroyed.*

[Photos donated by Ruth and Fales Peirce]

## Town Hall *continued from Page 1*

January, 1851, three town meetings were held to see if the town council would allow dancing in the Town Hall. The Hall had been remodeled and repaired and at that time was considered a very good hall... In December, 1850 at a special meeting called for that purpose the town voted to hold dancing therein. A few days later a second town meeting was called to see if the town would reconsider its action. After a heated discussion a hand vote was taken and the reconsideration was declared to be carried, but the vote was doubted and it was decided to divide the house. All who favored reconsideration to follow Deacon Viall Medbury and all who were opposed to follow William Ide. Both sides went outside and formed companies. The leaders soon returned with the announcement that the majority was in favor of reconsideration. The party which favored dancing was not yet satisfied and a THIRD town meeting was called and the hall was crowded." The dancing side lost on the third vote. When the town became East Providence in 1862 dancing was voted in and there were no further objections to holding dances in the hall.

In the 1950's the Town Hall served as a public kindergarten. A movement was afoot proclaiming the Town Hall unsafe. Preservation and restoration of historic buildings was not a consideration in 1957, the Town Hall was condemned and the sturdy post and beam building containing part of the third Newman Meeting House went to the dump. It was said that the front door of the Newman Meeting House was the same front door of the Town Hall. Only a parking lot occupies this "historic place in time" today.

## Museum Committee

*Virginia Berwick, Chairman*

We are sort of coasting along at the Hunt House, no set hours, but we still have visitors.

This past Tuesday, a young lady came in and I, thinking she was our new volunteer docent, gave her a tour of the Hunt House. She was very interested and impressed with all the work that has been done.

Well, when we finished, I asked her if she thought she would like working at the Hunt House and she sort of hesitated, then said, "Yes, it would be nice." I asked her if she was our new volunteer docent and she said, "No, Hope Glover told me I should get over to see it." When she told me her name, Debbie Goucher, I said, "My father had a Len Goucher work for him at the Kent Heights Store." Turned out to be her father. Interesting facts come to light at the Hunt House. Small world.

Three people have volunteered to serve as docents in the museum: **Marian Craven, Deborah Goucher and Charlene Underhill.** We will have an orientation at the Hunt House in March.

### EAST•PROVIDENCE•HISTORICAL•SOCIETY MARKER PROGRAM

Your Home May Be Eligible for a MARKER



Any building in the City of East Providence which contributes to the historical development or architectural character of the City is eligible to be considered for a historical marker.

Send coupon to:

The Marker Program  
East Providence Historical Society  
P.O. Box 4774  
East Providence, RI 02916-4774

I am interested in receiving information about the  
East Providence Marker Program

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Building & Grounds Committee

*Earl Berwick, Chairman*

Finally, the windows on the first floor are operational and have been painted inside and out. Storm windows have been leak-proofed, thanks to **Andy Valerio.**

**Larry Arden's** pegs, donated for holding coats, have been installed in the rear hall.

**Howard Mersereau and Tom Stringfellow** expect to resume their work at the house, soon. Welcome back! And we have a new volunteer... **Roger Vaillancourt.**

### ACCESSIONS - GIFTS

**Marilyn Brewer** - History of Orlo School; East Providence City Charter and Charter Revision; East Providence High mementos

**John Donahue** - Baseball uniform from the Theodore Francis Green team sponsored by Senator Green

**Edna Anness** - Antique bread board

**Myrtle Veno** - Photo of two covered bridges at Watchemoket

**THANK YOU!**

The East Providence Historical Society is dedicated to preserving the heritage and enjoying the history of our city. If you are not a member, we invite you to join now.

Annual dues are \$10, individual or \$15, family.

Please make check payable to:

**East Providence Historical Society**

Mail to:

Mona Breault  
34 Josephine Avenue  
Rumford, RI 02916

New  Renewal  Amount Enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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## Metacomet, better known as King Philip

*An excerpt from Our Heritage: A History of East Providence by Joseph Conforti*

"In 1862, when East Providence was incorporated as a part of Rhode Island, many older residents of the community could proudly boast of having lived in three towns and two states without ever having moved."

"In 1641 the Plymouth Colony purchased from the Indians a large tract of land which today includes the northern half of East Providence (from Watchemoket to Rumford), Rehoboth, Seekonk and part of Pawtucket. Four years later, John Brown of Plymouth bought a considerably smaller piece of land from the Indians which today comprises the southern half of East Providence (Riverside), Barrington and a small part of Swansea. Finally, in 1661, Plymouth completed the "North Purchase" from which Attleboro, North Attleboro and Cumberland were later formed. Over the whole the authorities gave the name 'Rehoboth', and in the course of more than two centuries the communities named above were carved from the original settlement. The center of this large settlement, which is sometimes referred to as 'Old Rehoboth', is to be found within the borders of modern East Providence."

"King Philip's war began in the early summer of 1675 as the inhabitants of Old Rehoboth were busy in their fields, and ended in the early fall of 1676 with many New Englanders lacking homes to live in, let alone crops to harvest. In one respect the war was the bloodiest in American history. When the several thousand whites who were killed are measured against the total population of America at this time (perhaps 100,000 people), one is left with a fatality rate which exceeds those of all other American wars. Where people managed to survive, their homes and towns often did not. In the fourteen or so months of the war, fifty-two of the ninety towns spread across New England were attacked, and twelve were destroyed almost completely."

"Old Rehoboth was one of this unfortunate dozen. Thus the war left its scars on the area for years to come. It was Old Rehoboth's fate to be in the heart of Wampanoag country, and thus to experience early and intensely the wrath of King Philip's warriors and their allies. Old Rehoboth's men retaliated in kind, and made significant contributions to the defeat and pacification of the Wampanoags on the East Bay and Narragansetts on the West. For all these reasons, the story of King Philip's War is a significant chapter in the history of New England, Rhode Island and especially the territory which today comprises East Providence."

"When the Pilgrims landed in Plymouth in 1620 Massasoit, chief of the Wampanoags of southern New England, befriended the settlers and helped them through their early difficulties in America. The death of Massasoit in 1662 came at a time when Indian grievances and resentment toward the English were mounting. Wamsutta, the oldest son of Massasoit, succeeded his father as chief of the Wampanoags. In a short while Plymouth officials called him to appear before them to answer questions concerning a plot against the whiteman. When the inquiry had finished, Wamsutta went to nearby Marshfield to visit a white settler. Shortly, he became ill, and his braves carried him through the wilderness to his home at Mount Hope where he died. Many

Indians came to believe that their chief had been poisoned by whitemen."

"Metacomet, better known as Philip, the younger brother of Wamsutta, now became the chief of the Wampanoags. Already hostile to the English, the death of his brother intensified Philip's desire to wage war on the white enemy."

"Swansea, the closest settlement to Mount Hope and the only obstacle in Philip's path to Old Rehoboth, was the first to feel the wrath of the Wampanoags. On the Lord's day June 20, 1675, the Indians began their war of revenge."

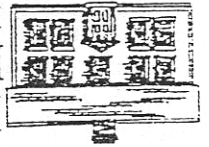
"As the people of Old Rehoboth huddled in their garrison houses, Philip led the Wampanoags and Pocassets (of the Fall River area) through the town. The men of Old Rehoboth, commanded by Rev. Noah Newman who had succeeded his father as minister to the people of the town, were joined in their pursuit of Philip by friendly Mohegan Indians from central Connecticut and by volunteers from Providence and Taunton. At a site in present day Burrillville, Rhode Island, they caught up with the Indians and managed to kill over twenty of them, but Philip and his main force escaped into Nipmuck country. Philip with his Wampanoag braves and Nipmuck followers attacked towns up and down the Connecticut River Valley."

"The English came to believe that the military successes of the Wampanoags were achieved only because the powerful Narragansetts were aiding them. Military and civil leaders began to draw up plans for the single most bloody battle in Rhode Island history - the Great Swamp Fight. By early December troops had begun their trek toward Narragansett country from all over New England. The battle resulted in a resounding English Victory but the war was far from over. The disaster known as 'Pierce's Fight' began when the English spotted several Indians and began a chase into the wilderness. All this was by design, for better than five hundred Narragansetts were hiding in the woods prepared to attack Pierce's forces once the decoys brought them to the site of the planned ambush."

"Panic now struck Old Rehoboth. With the numerous Narragansetts nearby and nothing in their path to the town, some residents most likely left for Aquidneck Island. Those who elected to stay in Old Rehoboth sought the protection of the Newman garrison on the 'Ring of the Green'. The sound and the fury of the Narragansetts came and passed quickly, and when it was over Old Rehoboth stood no longer. The morning of March 28<sup>th</sup>, two days after the disaster of Pierce's Fight, dawned bright and crisp with a stiff breeze blowing across the Seekonk plain. The calm of this early spring morning was soon broken by the war cries and gunfire of the Indians. As night began to fall, the fear-stricken residents watched helplessly as the 'Ring of the Green' went up in smoke. The next morning, as the ashes continued to send smoke into the sky, the worst fears of the residents were confirmed. There was no town to which they could return. For the people of Old Rehoboth, it would take many years of hard work to restore vitality to their community."

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## *Events Calendar*

### **FEBRUARY**

**Monday, February 24, 7:30 p.m.**

Members Meeting,  
Riverside Congregational Church

**Lisa Roy**

**Registered Nurse/Civil War Reenactor**

**Subject: *The Fifth Wheel of the Wagon:***

*Medicine in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*

Presentation of Historical Marker

### **MARCH**

**Wednesday, March 5, 7:30 p.m.**

Board Meeting, Hunt House

Newsletter Deadline

**Monday, March 24, 7:30 p.m.**

Members Meeting,

Newman Church

**Barbara Sherman Stetson**

**Subject: *Good Old Days in the Kitchen***